

MOVEMENT THAT MEETS YOU WHERE YOU ARE

by Summer Kessel, RD, CSOWM, LDN

If the idea of “working out” feels intimidating, you are not alone. Many people in larger bodies have been taught that exercise is a punishment or something only meant for people who already feel fit. That message can make movement feel stressful instead of helpful. It is also untrue. I grew up both as an athlete and in a larger body, and I see movement differently. My hope is that this article helps you think about exercise in a way that feels supportive, realistic, and possible for you.

Movement is not a test. It is not about willpower or doing things perfectly. You do not owe movement to anyone. Some days you may move more. Some days you may not move at all. That does not mean you failed. Movement is one part of overall health. Health also includes access to health care, nourishing food, mental well-being, rest, and support. Exercise can support health without being extreme or all or nothing. There is no single right way to move your body. Movement counts in many forms.

Fitness can meet you where you are today, not where you think you should be. Walking around the block, stretching in your living room, dancing in the kitchen, doing chair-based movement, or lifting weights at the gym all count. The goal is not perfection. The goal is to build confidence, consistency, and a relationship with movement that fits your life.

“THE GOAL IS NOT PERFECTION.”

EXERCISE IS A TOOL, NOT A TEST

Health and weight management are complex. Many things affect them, including genetics, medications, stress, sleep, mental health, and access to care. Exercise plays a small role in weight change by itself. Movement is just one tool that can support health. It is not a cure and it is not a measure of your worth.

Many people think they need to lose weight before they can start exercising. Often, it works the other way around. Movement can help people feel better in their bodies before any weight changes happen. It can also be helpful even if weight never changes. For some, focusing on treatment or weight management first makes movement feel easier later. Both paths are OK.

You do not need to exercise to deserve good health care. Movement can be added when it feels right for you. For people using obesity medications or other treatments, movement can help support muscles, joints, and mental health. If you are not ready to exercise, that does not mean you cannot focus on other parts of your care.

People living with obesity deserve:

- Respectful, stigma-free medical care
- Nutrition support that feels realistic and enjoyable
- Mental health support that addresses shame and stress
- Movement that supports health, not punishment



WHY MOVE AT ALL?

Movement can support your health in many ways. It can help manage blood sugar, support joint health and mobility, improve mood, stress, and sleep, help maintain muscle during weight changes, and build confidence and trust in your body over time.

These benefits do not require intense workouts or expensive programs. They come from consistency. Consistency grows when movement feels doable. Before consistency can happen, you simply have to start.

STARTING WHERE YOU ARE MATTERS

When exercise feels like a test you might fail, many people avoid it. When movement is seen as something that can help you feel stronger, steadier, or more capable in daily life, it can feel worth trying.

STARTING WHERE YOU ARE MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Walking for five minutes
- Stretching or standing during TV time
- Doing chair-based movement when standing feels unsafe
- Dancing to one song
- Going to physical therapy
- Using free apps or online videos at home



These are not “less than” choices. They are smart and realistic. Confidence grows when your body learns, I can do this. As confidence grows, ability often grows too.

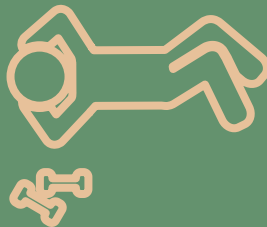
Movement does not need to look a certain way. Bodies are different. Schedules are different. Energy levels are different. Movement that works for you is any movement you are more likely to keep doing. If cost has been a barrier, know this. Your body does not know the difference between an expensive program and consistent movement at home.

PROGRESS IS BUILT ON SMALL WINS

Social media often shows exercise as something that leads to big, dramatic changes. Real-life progress usually looks quieter than that.

PROGRESS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Feeling less nervous about movement
- Feeling less sore doing the same activity
- Feeling steadier on your feet
- Needing fewer breaks
- Feeling proud that you showed up



When starting a new routine, ask yourself: What is the smallest version of this habit I can do on my hardest day? If the answer is five minutes, that is enough. Five minutes done often is more helpful than an hour done once.

You also do not need to love exercise right away. At first, it is okay to choose movement you can tolerate and repeat. Enjoyment may grow over time, but it is not required at the start.



NAVIGATING THE GYM WITH LESS STRESS

For some people, the gym feels motivating. For others, it feels uncomfortable or overwhelming. A gym can offer equipment and structure, but it is not required for movement to count.

If you are curious about going to a gym, these tips may help.

Before you join

- Think about what matters to you, like cost, location, or feeling comfortable
- Visit gyms at the time of day you would normally go
- Ask for a tour or short trial before signing up

When you start

- Begin with familiar equipment
- Ask about beginner sessions
- Use machines before free weights for more guidance
- Wear clothing that feels comfortable and supportive
- Set boundaries around sales pressure
- Start with realistic goals, such as short visits a few days a week
- Bring water and wear closed-toe shoes

Most people at the gym are focused on themselves.

You are allowed to take up space exactly as you are. A gym that feels welcoming and realistic is more helpful than one that looks impressive.

About the Author:

Summer Kessel, RD, CSOWM, LDN is a registered dietitian and certified specialist in obesity and weight management. She is co-founder and chief of operations, community and nutrition at Vineyard, a virtual weight management and cardiometabolic health clinic, and the author of *Living Your Healthiest Semaglutide Life: A Complete Guide to Nutrition and Mindset While on GLP-1 Medications and Simple Meal Solutions for GLP-1 Diets: 75 Recipes for Sustainable Weight Loss and Good Health*. Her work focuses on personalized, sustainable, evidence-based nutrition that supports quality of life. She is also a person living with obesity and currently in maintenance on a GLP-1 medication. Summer shares her personal journey on social media at @summerthedietitian.

SHOW UP WITHOUT BURNING OUT

If you already move regularly, or if exercise has come and gone in your life, these ideas still apply. Doing more does not always mean doing better. It helps to pause and check in with how movement fits into your life.

Ask yourself:

- Do I enjoy this or dread it?
- Does it improve my quality of life?
- Does it crowd out other things I care about?
- Does it help me feel stronger or more worn down?
- Would I still do this if my weight did not change?

Burnout often happens when people do too much, too fast, for too long. Preventing burnout means allowing rest, flexibility, and change so movement supports your life instead of competing with it.

WAYS TO REDUCE EXERCISE BURNOUT:

- Rotate types of movement
- Try new activities or settings
- Plan rest days on purpose
- Adjust intensity based on stress and sleep
- Focus on consistency rather than performance
- Modify workouts instead of skipping them
- Take breaks when needed
- Let go of all-or-nothing thinking



PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Progress comes from protecting your ability to keep moving over time. Rest, sleep, recovery, and regular nourishment all matter. Listening to your body and adjusting when needed helps prevent injury and keeps movement sustainable.

Movement is not reserved for certain bodies. You do not need to change your body to deserve movement, and you do not need to use movement as punishment. You are allowed to start small, go slowly, change plans, and redefine what fitness means to you.

Wherever you are starting from, starting is enough. Choosing to move is one way to practice showing up for yourself, and that is a skill worth building.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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